

Environmental Mentoring Business to Business, Peer to Peer

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Boise Idaho

Summary of Findings

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Environmental Mentoring, Business to Business, Peer to Peer

Environmental Mentoring: A trust interaction between peers where one is voluntarily sharing some recognized environmental expertise.

Executive Summary

A workshop entitled *Environmental Mentoring, Business to Business, Peer to Peer* was held June 20, 2002 in Boise, Idaho. Participants included representatives from government, industry and non-profit sectors. Goals of the workshop were to:

1. Explore different models of environmental mentoring.
2. Evaluate mentoring as a tool for achieving environmental results.

The workshop featured presentations and panel discussions by businesses and third-party facilitators involved in environmental mentoring. The meeting also included two work sessions during which participants met and discussed environmental mentoring.

Following are insights and issues raised concerning mentoring as a tool for managing environmental progress:

- 1. Environmental mentoring is a tool that can help a company achieve environmental results, with benefits to both the mentor and mentee and the industry sector. Benefits of mentoring include greater efficiency in achieving solutions, networking, and enhanced public image.**
- 2. Barriers to mentoring can include concerns over liability, competition, resource constraints and perception. Although many barriers to mentoring were raised, solutions to these barriers also were proposed. Through creativity and careful planning, most businesses can serve as mentors or mentees.**
- 3. Mentoring relationships begin as a result of a passion or problem in the presence of an active leader.**
- 4. Mentoring relationships succeed when organized around a common theme, with the presence of an active facilitator, credible participants, and allow for flexibility in design.**

This paper highlights several of the major issues discussed at the workshop and presents recommendations for fostering mentoring relationships for environmental issues in the Pacific Northwest.

Workshop Overview

Environmental Mentoring, Business to Business, Peer to Peer was a one-day workshop that explored the use of mentoring in achieving environmental results. Prior to the workshop, organizers conducted research into mentoring and developed a working definition of mentoring as a basis for discussion. Environmental mentoring was defined as:

A trust interaction between peers where one is voluntarily sharing some recognized environmental expertise.

Under this definition, the goals of the workshop were to:

1. Explore different models of environmental mentoring.
2. Evaluate mentoring as a tool for environmental performance.

The Idaho GEMStars Program, Idaho Small Business Development Center, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Pacific Northwest Pollution Prevention Center (PPRC) sponsored and coordinated the workshop. The workshop was funded from an EPA PPIS grant awarded to DEQ and EPA Region 10 funding.

Setting the Stage: Mentoring Models

The workshop began with several presentations by speakers actively involved in mentoring as a tool to achieve environmental results. The goal of the speaker sessions was to present a range of mentoring models from which to explore the topic.

Speakers included representatives from agencies, businesses and non-profit organizations. Speakers were asked to draw on their experiences and explore what makes mentoring successful, the barriers to mentoring, and how to overcome these barriers. Models of mentoring were presented to set a context from which to discuss the viability of mentoring as a business tool. The models presented included:

Association: Members as Mentors: In this example, a larger facility organized its smaller-sized competitors into an industry network, with the goal of improving the industry's image and increasing efficiencies in the wake of an economic downturn. Businesses meet to share ideas and resources. The network is self-supported and requires the time of dedicated volunteers from within the industry including strong leadership by the larger facility. Benefits have included increased efficiency (time and cost) when addressing an environmental problem and greater representation of industry in regulatory and community issues. All facilities have received the benefit of an improved industry image. Smaller facilities have benefited by gaining a greater voice as part of a group.

Association: Association as Facilitator and Mentor: A trade association may assume the role of facilitator and mentor. In this example, an independent, staffed association took the lead to provide information, training and resources to its members. Association staff rely on members for technical assistance and support. This model requires an active trade association staff and a limited commitment by members. Benefits include enhanced public image, a united voice on issues and a reduced time commitment for association members.

Businesses: Mentoring through the Supply Chain: In this model, a larger company with few peers chose to mentor its suppliers through dissemination of information on environmental best management practices and voluntary reporting requirements. The model requires dedicated employees in the mentor company to administer the program. Suppliers are asked to report achievements. Benefits for the mentor include less liability from supplier error, compliance with product standards, and improved corporate image. Benefits to the mentee include easier access to information.

Government Agency: Dedicated Third-Party Facilitator: This model entails an active third-party entity that organizes businesses from many sectors around a common issue, such as protecting the watershed over a geographic region. The third party assumes an active role in soliciting business participation, matching mentors and mentees, monitoring their progress and reporting results. Because of the wide variety of sectors involved and geographic distances, this model also relies on flexibility in mentoring interactions which can range from a phone call to a site visit. Mentoring is tracked, although the types and depths of assistance vary greatly. The program has produced measurable results.

Peers: Volunteer Network: In this model, a network of volunteer businesses and professionals interested in the environment organize periodic learning groups around a specific topic. All aspects of the meetings are self-organized and meeting scope and logistics are handled by volunteers. These meetings have a clear beginning and end, with professionals coming together to share ideas and learn from each other. Attendees are both mentor and mentee, sharing their ideas and experiences while learning from others. Benefits include low costs, limited time commitment, and expanded networking opportunities.

Peers: Support Group/Peer Exchange: In this example, a network of volunteers serves as a mentor, providing collective expertise around an issue. The mentee business comes to the group with an idea or issue. The group helps the business develop the tools necessary to implement its idea, such as a business plan or marketing strategy. Mentoring occurs through training, mentoring and facilitation. Benefits include a wide knowledge base and range of experience from the mentor. To succeed, the relationship must have specified time commitments to reduce the burden on volunteers. This model is emerging into a more formal pay-for-service where the mentee business pays a fee to the network for its services.

Third Party: Consultants/Coaching: Coaching is a process by which an outside party works with a mentee to encourage progress in achieving environmental goals. Coaches take an active role in contacting mentees, inquiring about progress, providing resources and offering assistance. To have a successful coaching relationship, the coach must be credible and the mentee must be engaged and actively working on a goal. If the relationship is voluntary, (i.e. the coach is not receiving compensation) boundaries must be set to limit the time invested by the coach.

Applied Mentoring

Following the speaker sessions, two breakout sessions provided an opportunity to discuss environmental mentoring. Speakers and participants were seated so that a mix of each sector type was at each table to promote discussion among the diverse groups. The following questions were posed to the groups:

Breakout Session I

- What are the benefits of and barriers to environmental mentoring?
- How can a company overcome the barriers?
- What are the drivers or motivations that can get a company started?
- Are there other models or examples of mentoring that have not been presented today?
- Do some models work better than others for approaching sector, geographic/regional, or time-sensitive issues?

Breakout Session II

Think of a situation to which you could apply environmental mentoring.

- What type of mentoring model would be appropriate? Why?
- What resources or commitments would be needed to establish or maintain mentoring (contacts, participants, facilitators, data, goals, etc.)?

Results

The results of the speaker discussions, small group sessions and experience of the participants show:

1. Environmental mentoring is a tool that can help a company achieve environmental results with benefits to both the mentor and mentee and the industry sector.

Benefits include:

Networking: Mentor relationships allow businesses to come together, network, share experiences and learn from each other. Networking can occur within a sector or across sector lines. Mentoring also promotes interaction among different sized companies.

Efficiency: Mentors and mentees may realize increased efficiencies in achieving environmental results. Results for the mentee may be achieved quicker and at lower cost. As a result of sharing ideas and networking, industry sectors or peer networks may leverage resources and again realize greater efficiencies in achieving environmental results.

Improved sector image: Mentoring fosters proactive solutions to environmental issues that can benefit both the mentor and mentee. Mentors may be seen as environmental leaders. Mentees may be seen as proactive companies taking the initiative to achieve solutions in creative ways. The network of the mentor and mentee may give greater voice and publicity to the industry sector.

Level playing field: Companies report that mentoring promotes a level playing field for environmental issues. By sharing information and assisting competitors, the mentoring relationship can break down perceived competitive advantages by standardizing environmental expectations and practices throughout an industry.

Barriers to mentoring can include concerns over liability, competition and outside perception. Although many barriers to mentoring were raised, solutions to these barriers also were proposed. Through creativity and careful planning, most businesses can participate in a mentoring relationship.

Liability: Businesses are concerned that by providing leadership and advice in the role of a mentor, they could be held liable in the event of a problem later experienced by the mentee. Many potential solutions to this problem were raised including:

- The use of disclaimers in all materials, correspondence and reports from the mentor to the mentee.
- A clear contract or agreement signed up front with a disclaimer.
- Mentoring within the organization. This option applies mainly to larger organizations. Once environmental expertise is achieved in one area of the business, that division or facility can mentor other divisions in the same company.
- Indirect mentoring including sharing information through a third party such as a trade association, publication or Web site. By documenting environmental success in a public format, lessons can be gleaned and information shared with out direct contact.

Competition: Competition was another barrier for many businesses, especially for low-profit margin sectors. Again, many solutions were presented to allow even a highly competitive industry to become an environmental mentor. These included:

- Conscious decision to put aside competition. One company reported that although competition was a consideration, that sector was able to put aside competition when working on environmental and safety issues. The businesses found that by working together on these issues and sharing information, the entire industry was able to save money and become more efficient. The positive public image from taking a proactive approach to environmental issues was perceived as a greater benefit than any shift in market share.
- Mentoring on general or cross-industry issues. Many environmental issues, such as sustainability, environmental management systems (EMS), electronic recycling or green purchasing, are not specific to a single industry. Companies may focus on these topics and realize benefit without risking competitive advantage related to sector specific technologies, processes or trade secrets.
- Mentoring along the supply chain. Companies may choose to mentor their suppliers or contractors. This option works well for larger-sized companies. Companies involved in this type of mentoring report good relations with supply companies, reduced risk of liability and enhanced corporate image.
- Mentoring within organization. Companies that have multiple branches or divisions may find mentoring opportunities within the company. A division that adopts good inventory practices may be able to share this approach with a second division within the same facility. Or a facility that has completed an EMS may share its model and success with a sister facility.

Perception: The Businesses for the Bay Program facilitates matching mentors with mentees. The program reports no problem recruiting mentors, but has difficulty attracting mentees. Most businesses want to be a leader. Few businesses want to be the mentee. Few businesses appear willing to admit to needing assistance. Others fear that requiring assistance will raise a regulatory red flag. Large companies report that because of their size or dominance in the market their only option is as a leader and mentor.

For companies that do not engage in mentoring for fear of asking for assistance or drawing attention to a problem, indirect mentoring and active facilitators may help overcome this barrier. Indirect mentoring provides environmental incentives by highlighting examples of environmental solutions to mentee candidates. Sharing successes through case studies can help a struggling company find solutions to problems.

Active, credible third party facilitators also may prompt a business to seek the assistance of a mentor. This may require the third party to take an active role in contacting the

potential mentee and suggesting a mentoring relationship as a solution. This can be time and resource intensive.

The perception barrier affects potential mentors as well. Larger companies may assume that because of their size, the role of a mentor may be their only option. However, large companies still may serve in the role of a mentee. General issues such as sustainability cross sector boundaries and can be applied to businesses of all sizes. A large corporation may be able to learn from an equal-sized or smaller corporation about the principles of sustainability or green purchasing and how to apply them. In addition, larger companies often are made up of smaller divisions and multiple facilities. By mentoring internally, the corporation can serve as both mentor and mentee.

Nomenclature: The term “Mentor” itself may be a barrier to mentoring relationships. The term mentoring for some businesses brought up negative images of liability. For others it translated to a large commitment of resources. However, mentoring also may imply a level of hierarchy or leadership. Allowing for flexibility in defining the peer-to-peer interaction, whether mentoring, partnering or networking, may facilitate a mentoring relationship.

Limited Resources: Businesses perceive time, staff and money as barriers to mentoring. A mentoring relationship is expected to consume large amounts of resources to build and sustain.

Ways to minimize this barrier include:

- Define expectations of mentor and mentee, time commitments and duration of mentoring relationship up front. Explore how changes to these commitments, such as an extension in end date, will be handled.
- Focus on less resource intensive mentoring interactions such as phone or email rather than on-site meetings.
- Set project milestones and goals for success and measure progress and results to measure the costs and benefits in order to justify expense to management and shareholders.

2. Mentoring relationships begin as a result of a passion or problem in the presence of an active leader.

Environmental problems motivate businesses to start mentoring relationships. The network or relationship is organized around a facility-specific or general environmental issue. Many companies become receptive to mentoring after encountering a compliance problem or unwanted media attention. Companies may organize around a regional or national issue such as a watershed or airshed. By organizing and taking action toward environmental stewardship, facilities often realize benefits such as improved corporate image in addition to environmental benefits.

Some facilities mentor because of a true passion for the environment. They may also join because of recognition through a credible third party such as an award program. In these

cases, a leader within the business establishes environmental excellence as a corporate value.

In all cases, leadership is needed to help a business become involved in mentoring. The leader may be a business that seeks to help its peers or a third party tasked with organizing businesses around an issue. The leader devotes time to making introductions, serving as a mentor or developing common forums to bring businesses together.

3. Mentoring relationships succeed when organized around a common theme, with the presence of an active facilitator, credible participants, and flexibility in design.

Of all mentoring models presented, several common themes determine the ultimate success of a mentoring relationship.

Active facilitation: Most mentoring relationships succeed when an active facilitator helps organize and sustain the relationship. In the association model, the association takes the role of leader by organizing meetings for participating businesses. If mentoring introductions are made through a third party, the method must be proactive. Successful relationships begin when a formal phone call is made or a personal introduction brings together the mentor and mentee rather than through a listing in a directory.

Clear scope: Successful, broad-reaching mentoring models tend to be organized around a common issue such as a watershed, a specific topic such as sustainability, or an industry sector. A common theme can help minimize resources and increase efficiency. A common theme also can help identify goals, set milestones and determine measurements.

Credibility: The mentor and third-party facilitator must have credibility. Mentors must have experience in the issue or be recognized leaders in a particular sector or field. Mentors are proactive companies that have demonstrated a willingness to try out new ideas and are leading the way in new initiatives. Mentors recognize a variety of solutions to a problem. Some mentors might know of a good technology or practice, but not implement it themselves because of other constraints. However, they will recognize and explore this alternative with their mentee.

Flexibility: Successful mentoring models presented at the workshop varied in size, scope, assistance and issue. Common to all models was a business-to-business relationship working together toward an environmental goal. In most cases, participation was voluntary and exceeded requirements under state or federal law. However, participating businesses were able to develop mentoring methods to fit the situation and resources. Credit was given to mentoring regardless of whether it took the form of a phone call, a lunch, a site-visit or a series of meetings. The term mentoring may or may not have been used to describe the relationship. The flexibility of these models serves to sustain and grow the relationships to meet ever changing environmental needs.

Conclusions

Mentoring is a tool that can be used to achieve environmental results. Models for mentoring vary widely and can be tailored to meet the specific situation. To be successful however, several key factors must be in place. Specifically, successful mentoring requires:

- Clear objectives and project scope
- Credible participants
- Active facilitator
- Identification of potential barriers
- Recognition and measurement of benefits for all participants

Next Steps

Several actions recommended at the close of the roundtable may help facilitate mentoring as a tool for environmental outcomes.

1. Develop a registry of northwest trade associations and third party resources that may serve as facilitators for mentoring networks.
2. Continue to develop and promote case studies of business achievements in pollution prevention and resource conservation. This indirect mentoring method works well over large geographic distances and across sectors.
3. Explore issues in the Pacific Northwest where a mentoring model might be applied such as a geographic location like a bay or watershed, a regional industry or a common environmental issue such as salmon recovery.